

History of Iran and How the CIA Toppled Iranian Democracy: There was a time when Iran was free only in name. Great Britain controlled Iran's oil wealth. The British stole the oil while the Iranian public rotted in poverty. Then a popular PM came to save Iran. He reestablished Iranian control over its oil reserves. However, the British conspired to topple him with US support.

What was this conspiracy? PM, Dr. Mossadegh succeeded or not? Why does the US regret this conspiracy today?

## History of Iran and CIA Conspiracy

Mossadegh is the greatest secular and nationalist leader of modern Iran. He belonged to the Qajar dynasty, a former royal family of Iran. The dynasty ruled Iran from 1789 to 1925. Then this family was replaced by the Pahlavi dynasty. The 1st Pahlavi king Raza Shah took oath in December 1925. Ahmad Shah Qajar, the last king of the Qajar dynasty was exiled to Paris.

Dr. Mossadegh had held several official positions in the Qajar government. He also served as Iran's Minister of Finance and Foreign Minister. When Raza Shah Pahlavi took over, Mossadegh quit politics. In 1946, Raza's son Muhammad Raza Shah Pahlavi was the King of Iran. In that year, Dr. Mossadegh re-entered politics. The reason for his return was the movement to nationalize Iranian oil. This movement made Dr. Mossadegh an Iranian hero..

## British Role

The movement was started by the oil refinery workers in Abadan in 1946. The British Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was controlling Iranian oil at that time. The British government-owned more than 50% of the company's shares. Iran wasn't a shareholder. In a way, Iranian oil had become British property.

The British company was transferring Iranian oil wealth to Britain. However, the Iranian people, the real owners, weren't getting anything. The majority of the Iranian people were living in poverty. Even the Iranian workers of the British Company were living a difficult life. More than 10,000 workers of Abadan Oil Refinery lived in huts. They had no clean drinking water, no electricity, and no other facilities. These workers went on strike in 1946. The British company threatened the workers. 2 British warships conducted drills off the Iranian coast to pressurize the workers. However, the Iranian workers didn't give up. They ended the strike only after the company agreed to raise their salaries. The strike ended, but the Iranian [people learned a great deal](#) from the incident. They learned that without controlling the oil wealth, they couldn't change their plight. Therefore, the Iranians started a movement to take over their oil reserves. They demanded the nationalization of Iranian oil to end the British monopoly. This movement lasted from 1946 to 1951, for about 5 years. Dr. Mossadegh was the main leader of the movement.

He spread the movement to nationalize oil throughout Iran. Rallies and processions began to take place in villages and cities. Mossadegh and his colleagues explained to the public the

benefits of nationalization. Mossadegh had also formed a political alliance called the National Front of Iran. He also supported nationalization in the Iranian Parliament. By 1951, this movement had become the voice of every Iranian patriot. The Iranians were so emotional that they even killed the opponents of the movement.

In 1951, a group called Fidayeen-e-Islam killed Iranian PM Haji Ali Razmara. He was opposed to the nationalization of Iranian oil. On March 15, just days after his murder, the parliament approved the nationalization. This long dream of the Iranian people had come true.

The [people attributed the success](#) of this struggle to Dr. Mosaddegh. He was elected the new Iranian PM by the Iranian Parliament next month. But the economic situation grew from bad to worse under his rule. A British conspiracy fuelled this economic meltdown. The biggest loser in the nationalization of Iranian oil was Britain. Because it had lost the huge oil wealth it was snatching from Iran. The estimated net worth of the British Oil Company in 1951 was \$585 million. The UK earned £100 million profit annually from the Iranian Oil Company. It also received 22 million tons of products and 70 million tons of crude oil. Britain was by no means ready to give up this wealth.

## CIA Involvement

Britain wasn't a superpower. This status had gone to the US and the Soviet Union. However, Britain was still a major military and economic power. Winston Churchill was then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. He had led Britain to victory over Nazi Germany in World War II. He was re-elected Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1951. He did not want to lose Iran's oil wealth in any way. When Iran nationalized its oil wealth, Churchill launched retaliatory actions against Iran. Winston Churchill immediately ordered the blockade of Iranian ports. The blockade was intended to prevent Iran from selling its oil abroad.

In June 1951, an Italian ship \Rose Mary\ sailed with 1,000 tons of Iranian oil. The British warships took it to the British-controlled Yemeni port of Aden. Here, British authorities confiscated oil loaded on Rose Mary. As a result of this action, other countries stopped buying oil from Ira. They thought it unwise to buy the oil that couldn't reach them. Then, in October 1955, the United Kingdom took another action. It recalled all its engineers and other staff from Iran. Now the Iranians had no means to extract and refine oil. Now Iranians couldn't extract or sell their oil. Thus the Iranian oil industry came to a standstill.

The workers of the Iranian oil industry also became unemployed. The UK also froze Iran's accounts in London. It also stopped sugar and steel exports to Iran. These bans harmed the Iranian manufacturing industry. As a result of these retaliatory actions, Iran suffered a severe economic crisis. Churchill had hoped for a public backlash against Mosaddegh. He thought the Iranian people would overthrow his government. Yet Dr. Mossadegh remained a popular leader despite economic sanctions. Now Churchill decided to overthrow his government through conspiracy. He asked the US to help him. The declassified American documents have now proven that. British diplomats were asking the Americans for help. Harry Truman was the American president at the time. He refused to take action against Iran. He didn't see any benefit for America in doing so. From 1951 to 1952, the situation remained unchanged. Churchill and

British intelligence MI6 tried their best. Yet the US didn't help them.

The situation changed when Eisenhower became president in November 1952. MI6 tricked the US government into action against Iran. Even a shrewd person like Eisenhower couldn't understand their trick. What was this trick? In the 1950s, the US was afraid of only one thing. Communism. At the time, the Cold War was raging between the US and Soviet Russia. The Cold War triggered another war in Korea. There was only one dilemma for the Americans. It was the fear of the Communists taking over the world. Even Americans called the polio vaccination a Communist conspiracy. The public was cautioned against the polio vaccination in newspaper ads. Even the superstars like friend Charlie Chaplin fell victim to this fear. He was banished from the US for 20 years for allegedly being a communist.

MI6 contacted the Foster brothers. John Foster Dulles, the US Secretary of State, and Alan Foster Dulles, the CIA chief. MI6 warned them of the 'danger' posed by Mossadegh's government. They said that Iran was in danger of becoming a communist state. It meant that another powerful country would become America's enemy. Now communism was a sensitive point for the Americans. So Britain succeeded in convincing them. It convince them that it was necessary to topple Mossadegh to save Iran. Soon the Foster brothers were ready to topple the Iranian government. They also convinced the US President Eisenhower and got permission to do that. Thus, in 1953, it all began. The CIA launched its operation. The CIA codenamed it the Operation TPAJAx (Ajax). The British MI6 called it Operation Boot. The US declassified documents confirm Operation Ajax. The CIA also prepared a summary of the Operation. It was titled \Campaign to install a pro-Western government in Iran\.

According to the summary, the target of Operation Ajax was Dr. Mossadegh. The CIA was authorized to use legal and quasi-legal methods against Mosaddegh. The plan was to replace him with a pro-Western government led by the Shah. General Zahidi was to be the new Iranian PM. Operation Ajax had 4 phases. In the 1st phase, the press and mosques had to launch a campaign against Mossadegh. Then military officers would convey to Mossadegh the Royal decree of his dismissal. It was the 2nd phase. They had to arrest him in case he resisted. In the 3rd phase, pro-Shah military and civilian groups would take to the streets. They were to take over Tehran. They were also to seize army and police headquarters, Army Radio and Radio Tehran. Thus, Tehran was to fall completely under rebel control. In the 4th phase, a CIA-selected PM was to take charge under a Royal decree. As you know, Fazlullah Zahidi was selected as the new PM. The CIA also paid him over 100,000 dollars as a bribe. He was then hidden in a CIA safe house near Tehran. In case of failure, he was to avoid arrest.

Kermit Roosevelt Jr. was chosen as the CIA agent to conduct the operation. He was the grandson of US President Theodore Roosevelt. He arrived in Iran in July 1953. He resided in a Tehran villa under the fake name 'James Lockridge'. Even before his arrival, the 1st phase of Operation AGX had begun. The CIA provided funds to journalists, politicians, and clerics to oppose Dr. Mossadegh. The Iranian press published a lot of propaganda news against Dr. Mossadegh. He was called a British agent, communist, homosexual, and even a Jew. 75% of Tehran's newspapers were under the CIA's influence or were on its payroll. They frequently published anti- Mossadegh articles. All these articles were written in the CIA offices in Washington. These articles were published with big headlines on the front pages. But Dr. Mosaddegh didn't try to stop this campaign. He refused to suppress the freedom of the press. He had great respect for the sanctity of the free press.

Blog Post on Youth Times History of Iran and How the CIA Toppled Iranian Democracy

The CIA also tried some other tactics. They made fake threatening calls to clerics to provoke them against Dr. Mosaddegh. The calls were said to be made by the communist Tuda Party. The callers threatened the clerics with dire consequences if they opposed Mossadegh. CIA agents disguised as Tuda Party workers committed acts of violence. They attacked religious leaders. A mosque was also desecrated in Tehran. The homes of some religious leaders were even bombed. Such actions provoked the religious community against Dr. Mossadegh. Thus, the 1st phase of Operation Ajax was complete.

The CIA had successfully provoked public anger against him. Now they had to convince the King to issue 2 decrees or 'farmans'. Under the 1st decree, the Shah had to dismiss Dr. Mosaddegh. The 2nd decree would appoint General Zahidi as the new PM. The CIA had prepared the documents, the Shah only had to sign them. However, it proved difficult to get the signature from the Shah of Iran. Reza Shah Pahlavi was afraid of Dr. Mosaddeq. This was because Dr. Mossadegh was a popular leader. Attempts to remove him could have led to a revolution against the Shah. Just a year before Operation Ajax, a military coup had taken place in Egypt. Shah Farouk of Egypt was overthrown. The Egyptian story could have been repeated in Iran. Iranian army chief General Taqi Riahi was loyal to Mosaddegh. Dr. Mossadegh could abolish the monarchy through parliament. Thus the Shah would have lost his power and even become a prisoner. That's why he was refusing to sign these decrees. The CIA sent Shah's twin sister, Princess Ashraf from Paris to convince him. Princess Ashraf was also gifted a bag of money and a precious coat. But even she couldn't convince her brother and returned to Paris. Then the CIA played another card. They used an old friend of the Shah. He was a former US general named Norman Schwarzkopf. He was stationed in Iran during World War II. He had trained the Iranian police and was a friend of the Shah. The Shah relied heavily on his advice.

So the CIA sent Schwarzkopf to Tehran to convince the Shah. Schwarzkopf was given a diplomatic cover. It was said that he was touring Lebanon, Egypt, Pakistan, and Iran. Schwarzkopf arrived in Tehran on August 1 with 2 bags full of dollars. He immediately met the Shah at his palace. He asked the Shah of Iran to trust the CIA and sign both decrees. But the Shah was very nervous. He only responded with hand gestures. He was afraid of microphones so he asked his guest to accompany him. They took Schwarzkopf with him to a ballroom. Here he dragged a table to the middle of the room. Then he climbed on the table and asked Schwarzkopf to do the same. Now the Shah was comfortable enough to talk. He thought he had deceived the supposed microphones in this way. Then the Shah spoke and once again refused to sign the decrees. The meeting ended, but there was a breakthrough. The Shah agreed to meet the US agent Kim Roosevelt in Tehran.

Now the success of Operation Ajax depended on this one meeting. It happened on the night between 2nd and 3rd August 1953. A car was speeding through the semi-dark streets of Tehran. There was a man lying on the floor of the car covered with a blanket. This arrangement was made to hide him from the public view. The car was heading towards the palace and the person was Agent Kim Roosevelt. Shortly afterward, the car entered the royal palace. The lights were off in the area where the car was parked. As the car stopped, the driver stepped into the darkness and got out of sight. Meanwhile, a thin man walked out of the palace and approached the car. He opened the door and Kim Roosevelt saw that he was the Shah of Iran. The two shook hands. Shah said, 'Good evening Mr. Roosevelt.'

Then they both sat in the car and closed the door. Now a conversation started. Roosevelt talked

Blog Post on Youth Times History of Iran and How the CIA Toppled Iranian Democracy

about Dr. Mossadegh. He warned that Mossadegh would make Iran a communist state or a 2nd Korea. He also warned that America and Britain wouldn't accept this. The Shah had to sign the decrees to avoid any problems. He had to dismiss Mosaddegh and appoint Zahidi as the new PM. However, the Shah refused once again. The meeting ended and Roosevelt returned in the same car. However, their meetings continued. They met every midnight and discussed this matter in the car. Roosevelt pressed on with his arguments. At last, on the night of August 9, Shah agreed to sign the decrees. However, the Shah decided to move to Ramsar with his Queen. The city, 228 km from Tehran, is situated on the bank of the Caspian Sea.

The Shah had a royal hunting lodge and a palace surrounded by green hills. There was also a runway and a Beechcraft for the Shah. It was Shah's escape route in case of failure. He had decided to escape from Iran on the plane. Roosevelt agreed with Shah's plan. Then he returned to his safe house. Now the CIA sent the royal decrees to the Shah. However, the Shah had already left for Ramsar. Though earlier, he had agreed to leave only after signing the decrees. Now the CIA had to go to Ramsar to get his signatures. Colonel Nematollah Nassiri, head of the royal guards, was sent to Ramsar. He got the signatures and sent back the decrees to Tehran. On August 12, at midnight, Roosevelt received both the decrees.

Now the 2nd phase of Operation Ajax was set in motion. Military officers were to arrest Dr. Mossadegh under the royal decree. Once again, Colonel Nassiri was chosen for the purpose. He had to move out with military units on the night of August 15. First, he was to arrest the Army Chief. You know that the Army Chief was loyal to Dr. Mosaddegh. Then, Colonel Nassiri was to go to Dr. Mosaddegh's house and arrest him. The other 2 phases would prove easier after his arrest. Shah's supporters could easily take to the streets, and General Zahidi could become the PM. The plan seemed to be working. CIA Chief Allen Dulles was so sure of the plan's success. He took a holiday trip to Europe a week before the plan's execution. He wasn't aware of a problem. An unknown person had exposed the CIA's operation Ajax. The Army Chief was also aware of this plan.

Now the Iranian military was waiting to arrest the rebels red-handedly. Then the conspirators made their next move. On the night of August 15, the CIA started the coup. Colonel Nassiri approached the Army Chief's house with a military convoy. However, the soldiers found the house empty. They found no one, not even a servant or watchman. It was obvious that something was wrong. This should have alarmed Colonel Nassiri. But he didn't pay attention. He moved to Dr. Mosaddegh's house. But when he reached there. The Iranian army surrounded and arrested them. Some Iranian commanders were standing in the shadows. They stepped from the Shadows and escorted Nassiri into a jeep. He was taken to the army headquarters before the Army Chief. General Taqi called him a traitor and dismissed and imprisoned him. The Iranian troops took over the city of Tehran on General Taqi's orders. They arrested the other conspirators. Some rebel Iranian commanders were already occupying positions in Tehran. They had also taken over the telephone exchange. They had also raided Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Fatemi's house. He was dragged out of his bedroom. However, the Iranian military retook the city and got him released.

At 7 A.M., Dr. Mosaddegh spoke over the radio. He declared that a foreign conspiracy was thwarted. Thousands of Mosaddegh supporters came out and chanted happily. They declared that their nation had won and that Mosaddegh was victorious. The protesters also chanted slogans against the Shah of Iran. A statue of Shah's father was installed on a high pedestal in

Blog Post on Youth Times History of Iran and How the CIA Toppled Iranian Democracy

Tehran. The protesters demolished the statue. They broke it into pieces and took away those pieces as a souvenir. The Shah had already known the outcome from Radio. He woke up the Queen, they boarded their Beechcraft and fled to Baghdad. Then they moved to Rome from Baghdad. All the CIA agents took refuge in their safe houses. Kim Roosevelt hid in the US embassy. The CIA's selected PM General Zahidi was already in the hiding. It looked that the CIA conspiracy had failed. But then a 'sudden revolution' (spontaneous revolution) changed everything.

What was this sudden revolution? As the Mosaddegh supporters celebrated, the CIA was making another plan. The CIA distributed \$50 thousand among Shah's supporters. And supported them to start violence in Tehran. The next day the pro-Shah protesters started violent protests in Tehran. Their mission was to jam the government machinery. So the rioters, with US support, jammed the life in Tehran. The US often uses one party against the other. It also provides unseen financial aid. All this is done to fuel unrest, thus fulfilling American interests. The CIA brought thousands of southern tribesmen to Tehran. Trucks and busses, full of these tribesmen, arrived in Tehran. These tribesmen rioted in the city. Pro-Shah protesters took to the streets with Shah's posters. The CIA had brought wrestlers and bodybuilders to the city. An ideal choice for the riots. US deputy ambassador William Rountree called it a 'sudden revolution' (spontaneous revolution).

The rioters started their final action on the morning of August 19. There's notorious goon Shaban Jaffrey was also among them. He was on the CIA's payroll and participated in the riots with his gang. The rioters targeted every building that was linked to the government. The offices of 4 pro-government newspapers were torched including 'Bakhtar-e Emruz'. Dr. Mosaddegh's house and party headquarters were also torched. Dr. Mosaddegh was already going into hiding. The rioters also tortured many cabinet members. CIA agents also took over Radio Tehran and the other important buildings. Mosaddegh's supporters also battled with the attackers on the streets of Tehran. Americans wanted all this.

Around 300 people died in the riots. Even the Iranian military was powerless. The rebels also arrested General Taqi. The mob rode the tanks, waving Shah's posters. By the evening of August 19, the Army Chief was arrested and the PM was in hiding. Dr. Mosaddegh's government had lost its writ. Now the coast was clear for the CIA. They started the 4th phase, i.e., installing General Zahidi as the new PM. General was given a new dress for the occasion. But something was missing. The CIA agents attached buttons to the coat. Now General Zahidi was ready to become the PM. He left for Tehran. The CIA already had the royal decree of his appointment. He took charge of the pm's office. Dr. Mosaddegh also surrendered after a few days.

On August 22, the Shah also returned to Tehran and began his dictatorship. Dr. Mosaddegh spent 3 years in jail. Then he was taken to Ahmadabad, 96 km away from Tehran. He was put under house arrest in his own mansion. Not it is called Ahmadabad-e Mosaddeq. Dr. Mosaddegh was brought to Tehran in 1967 for cancer treatment. He was admitted to the Najmiyeh Hospital Tehran. He died on 5 March 1967. He was buried in a room in his mansion in Ahmadabad-e Mosaddeq.

The Shah of Iran proved his loyalty to the US and the UK. The UK and the other western powers retained 50% of the Iranian oil wealth. An oil consortium was formed in 1954 to control Iranian oil. 50% of oil reserves were given to American, British and French companies. Iran controlled

Blog Post on Youth Times History of Iran and How the CIA Toppled Iranian Democracy

the remaining 50%. The US-Shah friendship grew stronger each day afterward. Even the US considered Iran its policeman in the Middle East. But the overthrow of Dr. Mosaddegh's secular government was a mistake. The US suffered backlash in 1979. Religious extremists grew stronger after Mosaddegh's overthrow. They overthrew Shah's government in 1979 in a so-called 'Islamic revolution'. The new Iranian government chanted slogans like 'death to America'. It also kidnapped the US diplomats. It fought proxy wars against the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia in Iraq and Lebanon.

Because of this, some Americans call Operation Ajax a 'mistake'. The former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, regrets this regime change. However, she says that the regime change happened because of the Cold War. Bernie Sanders says that had this not happened, Iran could have been different. The CIA released documents on this Operation in 2013 and 2017. These documents expose this conspiracy in detail. It means that the CIA had publicly admitted its role in the conspiracy. But it is too late for such regrets now. It is useless to cry over the spilled milk.